Connecticut Camping Association written testimony on Children's Committee H.B. 6574 – An Act Concerning Municipal Youth Camps Tuesday

February 7, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator Maher, Representative Linehan, Senator Seminara, Representative Dauphinais, and distinguished members of the Committee on Children. My name is Keith Garbart, I am representing the Connecticut Camping Association (CCA), speaking on behalf of all Youth Camps in Connecticut. I am submitting testimony in support of H.B. 6574 – An Act Concerning Municipal Youth Camps.

The CCA is a non-profit organization that promotes good camping practices and works closely with the CT Office of Early Childhood (OEC) and the American Camp Association (ACA). These camps are licensed by the OEC and inspected during the camp season every summer. Many of the camps have also chosen to become accredited by the American Camp Association, which requires meeting hundreds of standards and is voluntary.

One of the main purposes of the CCA is to further the interests and welfare of children and adults through camping as an educational and recreational experience. We are committed to ensuring that all children who attend summer camps in Connecticut benefit from the same level of safety and security that is provided by the OEC and their inspection process.

The act of the youth camp inspection, while cumbersome at times, is certainly an effective exercise in oversight from outside entities. Working with the OEC in this light is important and they are looking at it from the lens of an outsider at what you may perceive to be best practices. Most, if not all, youth camps have a Board of Directors, or trustees that certainly help in oversight of their camps. Many have risk management teams or services offered by their insurance companies to provide an outside look at their camp operations. This is a level of oversight that works in tandem with OEC and their regulations. It is an exercise that should be welcomed and appreciated and CCA certainly has developed this with the OEC and our member camps.

We do understand the demands of the licensing and inspection process. We, of course, would like to see all camps in Connecticut licensed and inspected to give parents a level of trust and security that they deserve in sending their children to summer camp. I think if you were to survey camp families that send their children to a municipal summer camp they would assume that they are licensed by the state just as others are. Parents cannot look up violations from an inspection report about municipal camps because the inspections do not happen. If the oversight of a municipal camp is through town officials only, where does accountability lie in the eyes of the public if there is no outside independent inspection or licensing.

We are certain that there are many ways this can be made possible for municipal camps to be a part of the licensing and inspection process. It is time that we do not find reasons why it should not happen but look for ways to work together on how this can happen. It should not be about cost or a cumbersome process but in the end about the safety of all children in the state of Connecticut. We all know and understand that our most precious commodity is our children and we all want the safety of our children

to always be at the forefront of our thoughts. We do not feel that you can put a price tag on the cost of safety.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts about this topic and look forward to answering any questions you may have as we move forward.

Respectfully submitted,

Keith Garbart

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CT Camping Association

Director - Renbrook School Summer Adventure